

## Ten Commandments for College Success

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As colleges and universities across the country prepare to welcome their new freshman class, many students are a bit nervous about whether they are up for the challenges that college presents. For almost three decades, I have had the pleasure of teaching, advising, and mentoring undergraduates, an experience that has shown me exactly what high school graduates must do to succeed in college. Here are what I call The Ten Commandments for a successful college career.

- 1. Thou shall attend class.** In high school, students spend about 35 hours a week in school. College students spend 15–20 hours a week in class. But just because there is less “seat-time” in college, don’t think that class is less important. In fact, class is more important in college, and students who cut class do so at their own academic peril. Make it a hard-and-fast rule to get to each and every class.
- 2. Thou shall take the initiative.** College gives you the freedom to design your own experience: You decide what courses you take, the major you want to study, the organizations you join, and the level of participation you want. Take the best classes you can find; seek lesser-known ways of fulfilling requirements. Make the college experience your own.
- 3. Thou shall learn to say “No!”** College offers infinite opportunities for students. But unlike high school, where you tried to do it all, college is a time to do a few things well. That means you will have to be selective when choosing among the endeavors that will compete for your time, energy, and attention.
- 4. Thou shall shop around for a major.** Selecting a major early is necessary in some fields and for some career paths, but if you are truly undecided about what major to choose, use your early semesters to take courses in various departments. Find subjects that interest you and professors with whom you want to study, for ultimately you will do better work in interesting courses that are taught by engaging professors.
- 5. Thou shall think differently about grades.** Students who are only interested in achieving a high GPA may be tempted to take less challenging classes in order to get better grades. But high grades are not necessarily synonymous with true learning. Challenge yourself by taking demanding courses in new areas of interest, and be proud of whatever hard-earned grade you receive.

- 6. Thou shall not cheat.** There are a lot of good reasons not to cheat. Honesty and integrity are two of them. But a more practical reason is that cheating cheats the cheater out of an education. Cheating just one time makes it easier to cheat again and again until one’s entire college career is compromised.
- 7. Thou shall study abroad.** Not only will study abroad experience give you the global perspective that is so desirable in today’s world, it will have a maturing influence on you. And unlike studying in your home institution, study abroad is a full-time, total immersion learning experience.
- 8. Thou shall assemble a supportive network.** New students focus on making new friends when they arrive on campus, and they should. But some of those new friends need to be older, wiser, and more experienced than you are. Get to know successful upperclassmen. Get to know your resident advisor, your academic advisor, and your professors so you have people to turn to should a problem arise.
- 9. Thou shall give back.** College is a tremendous privilege. You are attending college because you have the ability and resources that are requisite for being admitted. Not everyone is so fortunate. Spend some of your free time tutoring a young person, building homes for the less fortunate, or serving the hungry in a soup kitchen. Recognize that service to others is an essential outgrowth of higher education.
- 10. Thou shall get some rest.** Too often students are so involved with activities that they don’t begin studying until midnight, which makes getting a good night’s sleep nearly impossible. A lack of sleep means that you miss class or are inattentive in class, and also makes you more vulnerable to illnesses that can run rampant through a residence hall, leading to more missed classes. Strive to get sufficient rest each day.

**A**ll new college students are a little nervous about this next phase of life. But by following these commandments, you will get the utmost out of your college experience. ■

*\*This article was adapted with permission of the author from “THE Ten Commandments for New College Students.” Read the original article in its entirety at [medium.com/@gettysburg](https://medium.com/@gettysburg).*